

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 30 March, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

I usually begin these newsletters with a prayer.

The following thoughts are not a prayer, exactly. They were taken from the writings of Mother Teresa, and they constitute more of a meditation.

But certainly the spirit of prayer is in every word, so I offer them to you this week as a way of centering your thoughts on the basic meaning of Lent, which is simply “deepening our consciousness of God and the works of God in our lives”.

Hope your Lent continues to be good.

Here’s what Mother Teresa had to say:

People are often unreasonable, illogical
and self-centered...

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you
of selfish, ulterior motives...

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends
and some true enemies...

Succeed anyway.

What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight...

Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness,
they may be jealous...

Be happy anyway.

Give the world the best you have,
and it may never be enough...

Give the world the best you’ve got anyway.

You see...in the final analysis,
it is between you and God...

It was never between you and them anyway.

All good wishes that all of you may take time to recognize the grace of God in every moment of each of our lives.

And because we’re at war and each of us knows people who are in the thick of the conflict, here’s a prayer that remembers all of them and their families:

Father,

hold our soldiers in Your loving hands.
Keep them from spiritual and bodily harm.
Place them under the protective mantle of
our Blessed Mother Mary,
and send Michael and the holy angels
before them in every danger.
Give them and their families
courage, strength and hope.
In Your mercy,
grant peace to all Your children
in every nation on earth.
We praise You and thank You
in Jesus' Name.
Amen!

May God grant all of us peace...and soon.

CHECK OUT

Catholics in the Military at
www.catholicmil.org

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

ENGAGED ENCOUNTER

The Spring "Engaged Encounter" will be held for engaged couples over 4-5-6 April. If you're engaged and need Catholic marriage preparation, please contact the Chaplain's Office.

UCF RETREAT

Our cadet "United Catholic Fellowship" will sponsor a Retreat over Palm Sunday Weekend (11-12-13 April). Any cadet is welcome. Please contact CDT Pat Sullivan for information.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Every Friday of Lent at 1800, there will be STATIONS OF THE CROSS at the Chapel. Each week, the Ceremony will be followed by a simple supper of soup to observe the spirit of fasting.

DAILY MASS

Mass is offered every weekday (except Saturdays and holidays) in the Catholic Chaplain's Office at 0630. Everyone is welcome.

LENTEN FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Just for your reference during Lent...

Catholics are asked to ABSTAIN from meat on Ash Wednesday and on all the Fridays of Lent (including Good Friday).

Catholics are also asked to FAST on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday only (one full meal, two lesser ones). ABSTINENCE is asked of all those between the ages of 14 and 59.

FASTING is for those between 18 and 59.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS:

One of the classic Lenten devotions is THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS on the Fridays of Lent.

Traditionally, Lenten worship has drawn attention to the sufferings and death of Jesus, and THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS asks the participants to do precisely that: to WALK WITH CHRIST along the final journey of his life and to commemorate the things that happened to Jesus along the way.

The word STATION literally means "a standing still", and during the time of the Crusades (AD 1095 to 1270), it became popular for pilgrims to the Holy Land to follow the route that Jesus took as he was on his way to be crucified on Calvary. These pilgrims walked the streets of Jerusalem in large numbers and stopped (or STOOD STILL) at various points along the way to pray and meditate on the different things that happened to Jesus on that first Good Friday.

They remembered events that were mentioned in Scripture (eg, Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus carry the cross – Mark 15:21; or Jesus meeting some sympathetic women of Jerusalem – Luke 23:27), and they also mentioned events that had become part of the tradition of the journey (eg, a woman wiping the blood from the face of Christ). They used these prayers and meditations as a means of entering into the whole spirit of Jesus' sufferings and death.

Following the Crusades, when the Muslims recaptured the Holy Land, it became too dangerous for Christians to continue the practice – or even to travel to Jerusalem, so the custom of observing THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS in the cities and towns of Europe took the place of the pilgrimage overseas. It was a substitute that became a popular outdoor devotion throughout Europe during the Middle Ages.

People represented the critical events from Scripture or tradition about Jesus' journey to the cross (as was previously done in Jerusalem) by life-size statues, and the number of these STATIONS varied from five to as many as twenty.

In the 18th century, Pope Clement XII fixed the number at fourteen, and in the mid-18th century, the whole event was eventually moved inside churches.

When that happened, the devotions developed from real-life re-creations of the particular events to pictures on the walls of churches, and people were asked to use their imaginations to re-create the events of Good Friday. So the STATIONS became a much more meditative and private devotion.

Nowadays, most Catholic churches have the fourteen pictures of the final agonies of Jesus on their walls, and many Catholics find this to be a good way to focus on the meaning of Lent.

In the 1960s, it became popular to add a 15th STATION: the Resurrection of Christ. This represented the real “end” or “goal” of his original journey and reminded people that the only point of Jesus’ suffering and death was the triumph of his Resurrection.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS are observed at Most Holy Trinity on each Friday evening of Lent at 1800 (followed by a simple supper of soup – to observe the Friday FAST). Everybody’s welcome.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

- ...all our military personnel overseas.
- ...the POWs.
- ...the deceased.
- ...the families.
- ...the intention of peace and a quick end to hostilities.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, from time to time, I’ve thought about becoming a priest. I was wondering what the “qualifications” are.

A: I think the “qualifications” are pretty predictable. Let me list for you what one particular diocese looks for in priest-candidates:

- a) Closeness to God:
 - is there evidence that you have an active and real prayer-life with God?
- b) Ability to talk about your Faith:
 - you will need to preach and teach. Can you express your Faith in words so it makes sense to other people?
- c) Openness to lay-ministry:
 - priests cannot have “know-it-all” attitudes. Are you able to work co-operatively with all kinds of people?
- d) Openness to women:
 - do you have a healthy attitude in your relationships with women?
- e) Commitment to Church teaching:
 - do you know and believe what the Church teaches?
- f) Openness to ethnic diversity:
 - are you open to learning a second language?

g) Openness to the entire “formation program” of the seminary:

- are you able to adapt to the demands of seminary and priestly life, particularly to the demands of celibacy?

These are very general in lots of ways, but they cover the wide area of “human personality” and the particular demands that are made on priests.

Q: Father, my girlfriend and I want to do something for Lent more meaningful than just giving up soda or something. We couldn’t really think of anything, though, and we were wondering if you had any suggestions or could help us out.

A: “Giving up” things for Lent is an old and honorable idea, but over the centuries, some people forgot the point of “giving up” stuff.

And it sometimes got to the point where large numbers of Catholics were “giving up” all kinds of things without allowing the process to go its full course.

Which is to say, the point of any penance is to make you and me more OPEN TO GOD AND TO PEOPLE around us. “Giving up” can make us SELF-CENTERED if it isn’t attached to a process of allowing ourselves to becoming more OPEN to the presence of God and to the needs of others.

For example, the early Christians gave up many types of food during Lent, but they took the money they saved and gave it to the poor. They were often heroic in their “self-denial”, but they didn’t allow it to turn into pride or ego-centrism.

Instead, they channeled the strength that came from their self-denial into good deeds for others.

So, I always recommend to people that they think of doing both types of “penance”:

- a) “negative” (centered on self-denial; depriving oneself of something; fasting),
and
- b) “positive” (centered on others; outgoing; dedicated to improving someone else).

“Giving up” something is good, but then, find someone or some project that will benefit from your energies and your skill.

Also, an increase in PERSONAL PRAYER is a MUST during Lent. That provides the connection with God without which the whole enterprise has no meaning.

So, the combination of PRAYER, SELF-DENIAL and UNSELFISH GIVING really would make for a very healthy and profitable Lent, not just for you but for others around you.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

PRIDE:

OK, OK, so it’s not a theological topic, technically speaking.

But it certainly has lots of religious implications...and we certainly are always encouraged to be “proud of our accomplishments” or “proud of our soldiers” or “proud of whatever”...so it’s a pretty familiar part of human life.

But there’s a not-so-pleasant side to PRIDE, too...and it’s worth thinking about just a bit.

So I thought I'd sketch the Catholic traditional approach to this phenomenon we call PRIDE.

In traditional Catholic moral teaching, PRIDE is the first of the seven DEADLY or CAPITAL sins. It's the first because of the belief that PRIDE, in its warped form, is the root of all the other evils that people do.

Understood this way, PRIDE involves a self-centered and perverse sense of SELF-LOVE and SELF-ESTEEM. This does not mean that SELF-LOVE and SELF-ESTEEM are harmful attitudes in themselves; it simply means that they can reach a level which can go beyond acceptable moral boundaries.

And PRIDE can also be a good thing, too.

In its not-so-nice form, PRIDE is a self-aggrandizement that ignores God's sovereignty and the worth of other people., and it warps a true sense of self-worth in an individual. It can often bring out disregard or contempt for ideas and judgments other than one's own.

The most obvious level of this area of PRIDE is called VAINGLORY. You can see this when someone feels the constant need to demonstrate his or her own excellence and displays an insatiable need for everybody else's approval.

On the other hand, moralists speak of LEGITIMATE PRIDE, too.

PRIDE is legitimate if it is based in TRUTH: namely, the recognition that one's own talents are a gift of God and that one's own personality is broadened by doing the following:

- a) abandoning oneself to God's providence in everything;
- b) respectfully listening to others;
- c) admitting that one needs to be saved by Christ; and
- d) acknowledging the continual need to be supported
by the talents and gifts of other people.

Scripture constantly refers to ILLEGITIMATE PRIDE, and in the story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), it portrays the original pair as having been brought down by their PRIDE. You remember the snake saying: "If you eat of the tree, you will be like gods..."

In Sirach 3:27, you can find a similar estimation of the unhealthy type of PRIDE:

For the affliction of the PROUD man,
there is no cure; he is the offshoot
of an evil plant.

Or again (Sirach 10:12-13):

The beginning of PRIDE is man's stubbornness
in withdrawing his heart from his Maker;
for PRIDE is the reservoir of sin,
a source which runs over with vice...

And really, you could reduce the idea of the not-so-nice kind of PRIDE to that first line:

...man's stubbornness in withdrawing
his heart from his Maker.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"There is a law, written across the Universe,

that no one shall be crowned
unless he has first struggled.
No halo of merit rests suspended
over those who do not fight.
Icebergs that float in the cold streams of the north
do not command our respectful attention
just for being icebergs.
But if they were to float in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream
without dissolving,
they would command our awe and wonderment.
They might,
if they did it on purpose,
be said to have character.”

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
(d. 1979)

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Hang in there,
and let's be vigilant to remember
all our military brothers and sisters
in prayer.

Woodie